



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ROD BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

# NEWS

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## **Governor Blagojevich directs more than 500 Illinois National Guard troops to check on homebound people in East St. Louis, look for stranded travelers at Interstate rest areas**

*State Emergency Operations Center remains activated to coordinate  
assistance with local emergency management officials*

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today directed more than 500 troops from the Illinois National Guard to aid in efforts to ensure the safety of people in several areas of the state hard-hit by a major winter storm that pounded Illinois Thursday and Friday.

“Many people are still struggling to cope with the aftermath of this week's winter storm. Today, I sent Illinois National Guard troops to East St. Louis to check on people in neighborhoods hit hard by the storm to make sure they have what they need to get by. Illinois National Guard members will also check the status of Interstate highways from I-80 down to I-70 to check for stranded motorists and make sure they're safe for travel..”

Working with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency, the Illinois National Guard is providing approximately 100 Army National Guard Soldiers in East St. Louis to assist the City of East St. Louis. The Illinois Army Guardsmen will conduct house-to-house checks in East St. Louis neighborhoods to distribute important emergency information to households and transport people to a warming shelter if needed. The Illinois Guardsmen will also gather information in the affected neighborhoods regarding status of services, blocked streets or intersections, trapped vehicles and other information that would be helpful to police, fire and other city emergency departments.

The Illinois National Guard is providing additional soldiers and several aircraft to assess highway corridor conditions along I-74 between I-80 and I-57, I-80 between I-74 and I-57 and I-57 from I-80 south to I-70. The Illinois Citizen Soldiers will assess number of disabled vehicles

and stranded motorists along the highways and at rest areas, so IEMA, Illinois State Police, Illinois Department of Transportation and other state emergency response agencies can respond to those hardest hit by the storm.

“Even before the storms hit, Illinois National Guard began actively working with IEMA in order to assess potential impacts across the state and began developing a coordinated and coherent response to the developing weather situation.” said Maj. Gen. Randal Thomas, Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard. “We were also able to leverage Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers already in a federal status performing their monthly unit training to provide emergencies assistance to the people of East St. Louis and to assess highway conditions along key interstate corridors around the state. The Illinois National Guard has a ‘no-fail’ contract with the citizens of Illinois. Our response in support of IEMA reflects our dedication to the safety of the people our great state.”

As on Saturday afternoon, more than 222,000 homes remained without electricity, down from more than 250,000 on Friday.

On Tuesday, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency began preparing for possible activation of the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) by reaching out to state agency liaisons and gathering pre-event information on available assets and response capabilities. The SEOC has been activated since Thursday evening to monitor the storm condition and work with local officials on any state assistance needed. The SEOC will remain activated as long as necessary. To date the state has assisted in several ways, including:

- More than 120 cots from the Illinois National Guard and 600 meals were delivered by staff from the Department of Central Management Services to four shelters in St. Clair County.
- Using an Illinois National Guard Blackhawk helicopter, Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) truck, Illinois Department of Natural Resources snowmobiles and an Illinois State Police four-wheel drive vehicle, 200 meals were delivered to stranded travelers at a rest area along I-80 near Princeton Friday evening, and another 200 were delivered to stranded motorists at a rest area east of Galesburg. In addition, IDOT Aeronautics provided disaster intelligence to the SEOC via an IDOT helicopter flying above the rest stop.
- The Illinois National Guard will use equipment and personnel to assist with moving a small passenger jet at the Peoria Airport after it broke down, blocking the gate area.
- To date, more than 1,700 IDOT trucks have plowed more than 275,000 miles along Illinois interstates and highways.
- More than 325 people sought a warm place to spend the night at shelters established by the American Red Cross in nine communities.
- The SEOC is coordinating with local emergency management officials on assistance needed in their communities, including help with removal of branches and trees downed by ice, heavy snow and strong winds.